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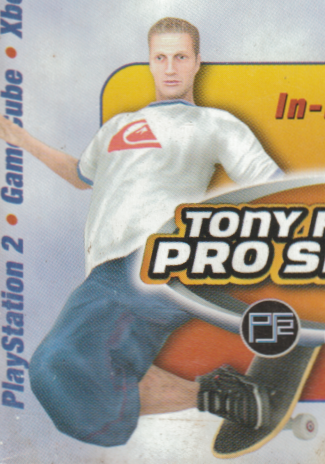

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

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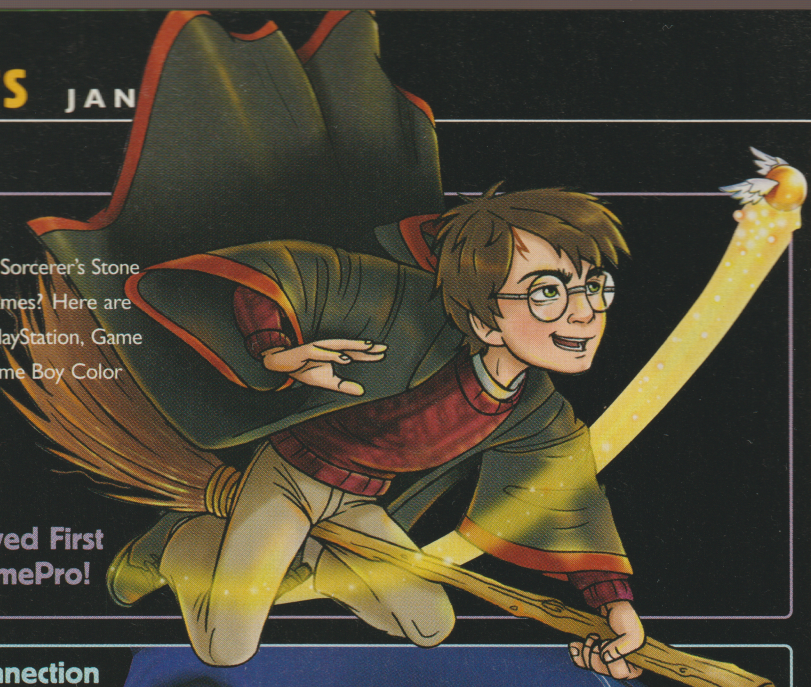

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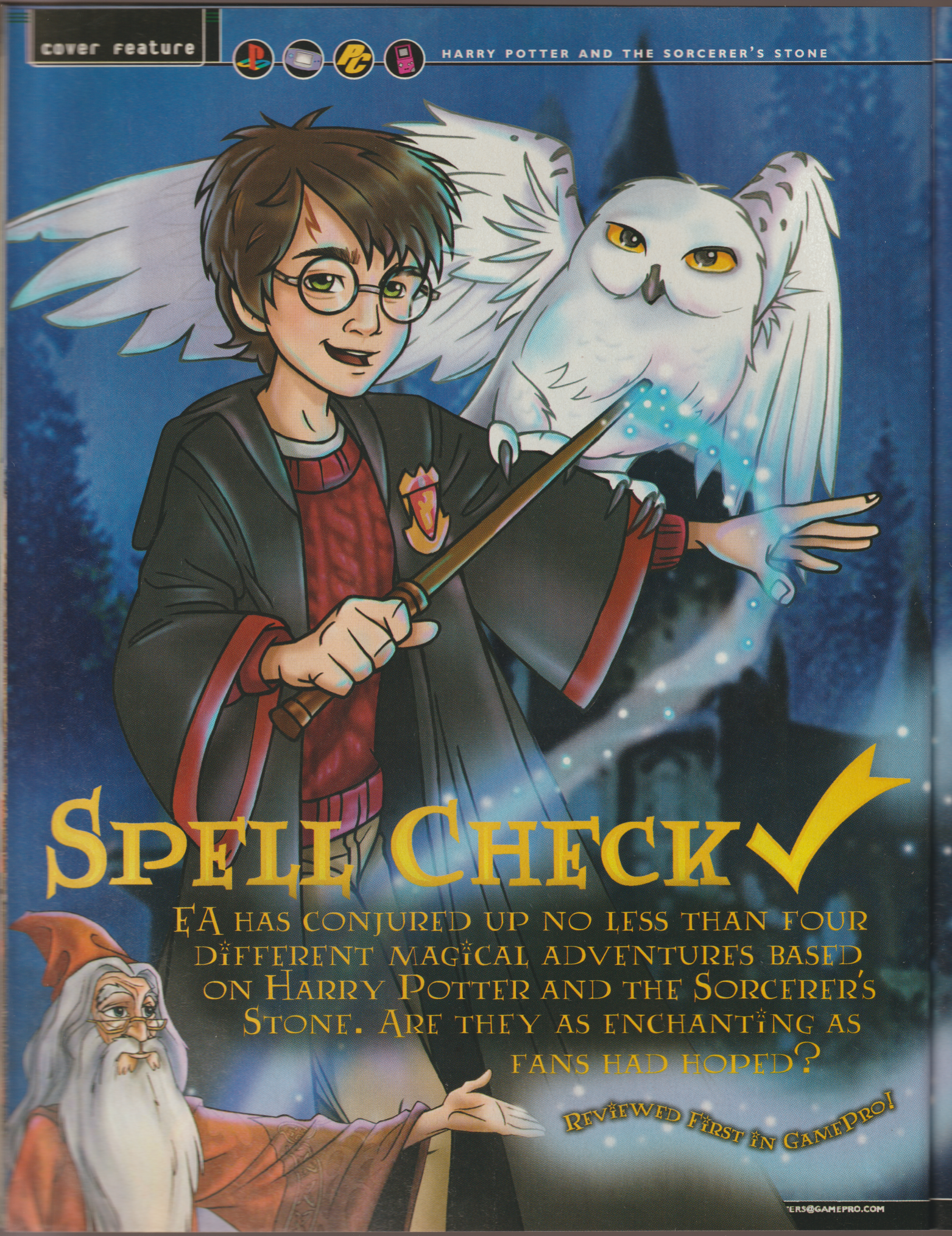


SPELL CHECK ✓

EA has conjured up no less than four different magical adventures based on Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Are they as enchanting as fans had hoped?

Reviewed First in GamePro!

BY AIR HENDRIX

- Developed by Argonaut Games
- Published by EA Games
- $39.99
- Available now
- Platform/ adventure
- 1 player

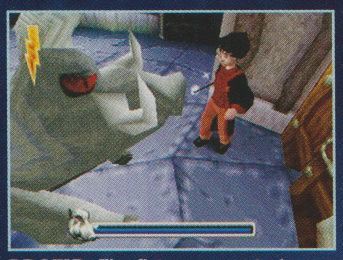
ESRB: E (Everyone)

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.5	4.0	3.5	3.5

A VITAL THREAD of the Harry Potter yarns is that wizards and Muggles (mundane, non-magical folk) mix like oil and water, and that applies neatly to Harry's PlayStation debut. Potter fans will delight in exploring this rich portrayal of J.K. Rowling's universe, but Muggle gamers who are immune to Harry's magic will be bored stiff by the stale, simplistic platform gameplay.

Super Wizard Crackers

Named after the first novel, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone puts you in Harry's robes for his first year at Hogwarts, the wizardry school. Sorcerer's strongest point is its slick re-creation of the book's world—fans will delight in moments like battling Draco with spell and broomstick, or attending Snape's Potions class. The world is impressively large and nonlinear, and respectable visuals and good audio breathe life into Rowling's words as you check out Hagrid's hut, recover the missing Hedwig, ride through Gringotts' tunnels, and experience many other straight-from-the-book highlights.



PROTIP: The flying stone pig (sent after you by a dark, hooded figure) takes damage only to its underbelly. Run underneath it, pop it with Flipendo, and when it's toast, levitate it back atop its column.

The gameplay, however, is the stuff of cliché rather than legend, involving lots of platform hopping mixed with some gentle puzzles, mild doses of action, and PaRappa-style sequences where you learn new spells. The Fun Factor directly corresponds to your level of Potter fandom: The joy of this game comes from experiencing Harry's universe, not from the repetitive, trite gameplay.

Borrowing from PaRappa and Dance Dance Revolution, Harry learns new spells by correctly timing a sequence of button taps.

Naturally, Sorcerer is aimed at younger gamers, and it has basic controls and lots of help to make it easy for them to play. Between tips from other characters and the onscreen hints, you'll rarely figure something out on your own. Jumping is automatic, and playing Quidditch (the wizard's soccer-like sport) is a matter of flying through a trail of rings left by the Snitch until a meter fills up.

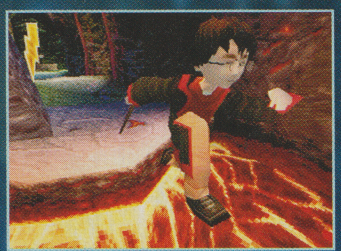
Chocolate Frogs

With legions of Potter fans flocking to bookstores and theaters, Sorcerer will surely enchant hordes of Harry's followers. If, however, you're a Muggle and proud of it, you'll find Sorcerer to be the kind of dreary platform game that you've played too many times before.

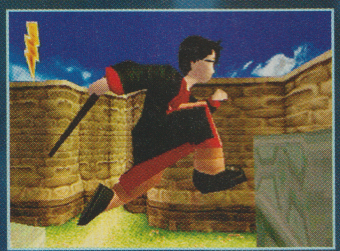
PROTIP: When you've flown through all the Snitch's rings, grab it by tapping × right when the Snitch on the meter makes contact with the hand icon.

PROTIP: Puffpods make trolls sneeze. Throw one at them right when they're standing on a grate, and the resulting blast will drop them through the grate.

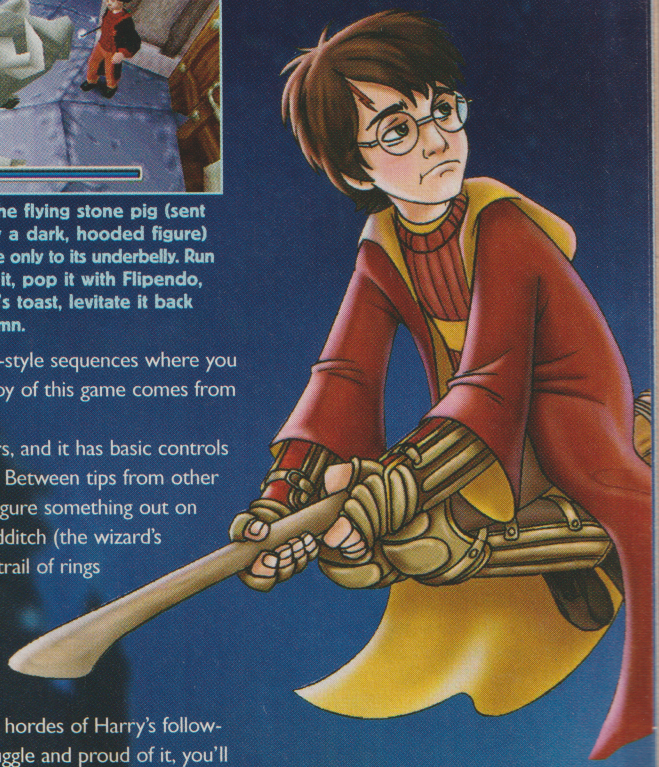
PROTIP: When battling Draco with wizard crackers, the best way to take him out is to run right up to him and throw your cracker.



PROTIP: When hunting down Hagrid's fire seeds, move quickly across these platforms–they'll crumble if you stay on them too long.



PROTIP: When you're on your way to Sprout's class, use a charged-up Flipendo (hold × until the tip of your wand glows) to move these blocks into a line, and then jump across them.



GRAPHICS 3.5

Sorcerer's main visual problems are a sometimes-sluggish frame rate and a camera that often loses track of the action. Sharp scenery and magical effects provide the pop.

SOUND 4.0

Excellent voice work and solid sound effects earn props for Sorcerer's audio. Although Harry himself never speaks, EA found good sound-alikes for the movie's actors.

CONTROL 3.5

The automatic jumping is too spastic, and flying on a broomstick takes a soft, steady touch. Overall, though, these basic controls are nicely streamlined for young kids.

FUN FACTOR 3.5

If you love all things Potter, Harry's PS game casts a powerful spell despite its tried-and-trite platform gameplay. For non-fans, knock another point off the Fun Factor.

CONTINUED

BY DAN ELEKTRO

- Developed by KnowWonder
- Published by EA Games
- $39.99
- Available now
- Action/adventure
- 1 player

EVERYONE E ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	3.0	4.0	3.5

HARRY'S DEBUT ON the Game Boy Advance is tougher than you might think, combining puzzles with repetition for a well-executed if standard handheld adventure.

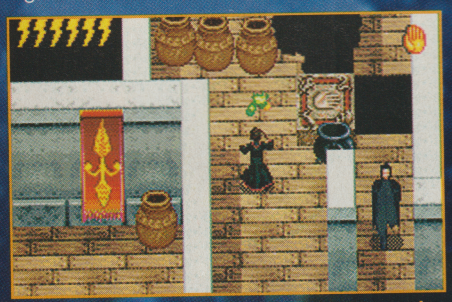
Porta-Potter

Like the other Potter titles, the Game Boy Advance game loosely follows the book, picking up from when Harry starts school. Fans will enjoy hallmarks like chocolate frogs, wizard cards, and Every Flavor Beans, which play various roles in health and progress.

The character animation is smooth, with many frames—which is good, since watching Harry run around is half the gameplay. Most of your actual tasks involve navigating 2D maze-like levels, collecting items while figuring out switch-and-lever puzzles. There's also a bit of PaRappa button pressing when learning new spells and some broomstick flying, which plays like a top-down racer without radar. However, the Game Boy Advance's infamous lighting problems do come into play, especially on some of Harry's shadowy, nocturnal missions.

Some of the gameplay mechanics are frustrating—one slip into a pit and it's back to the start of the segment. You'll also wish Harry could run faster while traveling long distances, but overall, the controls perform well—any errors you make are more likely to be caused by a missed visual cue than a botched button press. Speech is used sparingly, such as Peeves' laughter and when Harry calls out spells like "Flipendo!" (which, on the handheld, sounds uncannily like "Nintendo!"). The happy storybook music, despite its full arrangement, is sometimes just plain incongruous with the onscreen action. You can (and very likely will) turn it off.

PROTIP: Gnomes will zero in on you when they see you—your only chance is to run until you lose them, then zap them with Flipendo.



PROTIP: Several missions require you to sneak around the halls undetected, so peek over walls and time your movements accordingly.

Many of the puzzles involve finding hidden objects in an area of the school or its grounds, and they can be quite time-consuming.

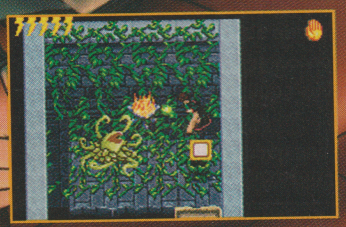
Tough Enough

The game is harder than you might expect—sometimes in challenging ways and sometimes in annoying ways, but hard nonetheless. The sadly limited save points mean you should expect to play for an hour or two each time you pick it up if you want to make real progress. Fans, however, will enjoy spending that time and more for the simple fact that it's digital Harry. Other players may find themselves less enchanted.

There are a few broomstick flying sequences, including chasing Malfoy, and simplified games of Quidditch.

PROTIP: You'll need Wingarium Leviosa to solve some switch puzzles—keep an eye out for nearby objects to levitate.

Harry learns new spells via a Simon Says–style follow-the-leader game.



PROTIP: Not all switches are good—some unleash traps. Beware when you activate one.

GRAPHICS 4.0

Skillful use of shadows highlights Harry's spruced-up, colorful 2D look. The character animation is particularly well done.

SOUND 3.0

The sound effects aren't anything major, and the speech—while clear—is brief. Both are better than the loopy, busy music, which gets grating fast.

CONTROL 4.0

Harry does as he's told via the directional pad, and spellcasting with the B button is simple and straightforward.

FUN FACTOR 3.5

Pottermaniacs will love exploring even a 2D version of Hogwarts, but be prepared for challenging and sometimes frustrating gameplay.

BY BAD HARE

- Developed by KnowWonder
- Published by EA Games
- $29.99
- Available now
- Action/adventure
- 1 player

EVERYONE E ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.5	4.0	3.0	4.0

HARRY'S PC APPEAL doesn't come from the straightforward, simple gameplay itself, but the joy of exploring a 3D Hogwarts in all its hoggy, warty glory.

MAGIC KINGDOM

As with most of the other Potter games, the PC version picks up as Harry begins his days at his new school and loosely follows the events of the book (though it helps to have read it before playing). Along his adventure, Harry collects Every Flavor Beans, wizard cards, and chocolate frogs while completing goals and learning new spells.

For Potter fans, seeing Hogwarts in hi-res 3D is the main appeal. Powered by the Unreal engine, every stained-glass window, translucent ghost, and rough-hewn wall looks gorgeous. You'll feel like you're there, whether you're fetching potion ingredients for Snape, sneaking past Filch in the tower, running from an angry troll, or racing Malfoy on broomsticks.

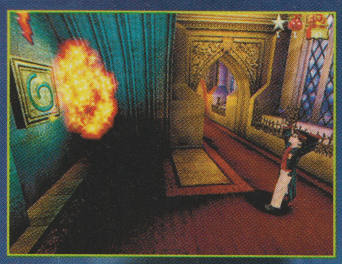
All that gameplay is fun, but none of it is particularly challenging. As with the PlayStation's version, unless you're an ickle firstie, chances are you'll breeze through the puzzles and only goof on the occasional platform jump. Harry can strafe only during certain action sequences, so control feels a little awkward. Also, flying a broomstick takes much practice, but learning new spells by mouse motions is a welcome and novel idea.

HOGWARTS AND ALL

The orchestral music has a nice fantasy feel that subtly adds to the atmosphere, and while the voice-acting is good, Harry sounds a bit constipated as he jumps and climbs. Beyond that, the inconveniences are minor, and Potter on PC makes for a fun, hi-res playground.

PROTIP: Learn the spells as well as you can to earn bonus house points—you won't get a second chance.

PROTIP: When battling Peeves, speed is essential. As he pauses to attack you, unleash a Flipendo.



PROTIP: Your spells have a range limit. If you're not close enough to your target, even the basic Flipendo won't work correctly.

PROTIP: Flying sequences are tricky; be sure to choose the proper Invert Broom setting to make control more comfortable.

WITH TURN-BASED BATTLES and a reward system centered on the accruement of experience points, the Game Boy Color version of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is a whimsical though somewhat flat Zelda-esque RPG.

BY SKY CHAMPION SILVER

- Developed by KnowWonder
- Published by EA Games
- $29.99
- Available now
- RPG
- 1 player

EVERYONE E ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	3.5	3.0	3.0

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The GBC game differs from the other Potter offerings since your initial quests take place before your enrollment at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. When you do get to Hogwarts, your professors will assign you quests, which you must complete in order to learn new spells and advance to higher levels. You'll also stockpile wizard cards, which enable you to create special kinds of magic to use against hostile creatures like rats, gnomes, and trolls. The Sorcerer's Stone isn't particularly puzzle-orientated, as most of the game centers on Easter egg hunts around the campus of Hogwarts for enchanted herbs, archaic tomes, and magical rabbits. This can get a bit tedious because you don't receive a map of Hogwarts and its surrounding areas, which results in endless random room sweeping and backtracking.

PROTIP: Search around Hagrid's hut for magical herbs.

PROTIP: Hagrid will assist you in your quests and can usually be found outside or near the entrance of Hogwarts.

Ron Weasley, Peeves, and many other characters who made the book so enchanting are all here in their 8-bit glory.

GBC RPG? OK...

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is a pleasant enough little adventure for pleasant enough little people. Harry's pixelated world is nicely re-created, with detailed textures and some nice character animations. The music is charming and catchy, albeit a bit monotonous. The control scheme is incredibly simplistic, even though the list-based menu system is too long. If you aren't a big fan of the book, you may have trouble locating certain people and objects during your quests. If you are, you'll find this Game Boy Color version to be a delightful, if a little bland, adventure.

Even magical people need a little help from their friends.